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Rural community all smiles about new healthcare center

By Norris Jones
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If you build it, they will come.

And when a new primary healthcare center recently opened between Baghdad and Fallujah, come they did in record numbers.

Dr. Mohammad Gassan said at the old clinic they were seeing 75 to 150 patients daily. Today they are treating 250 to 450 patients daily. "Some mothers are walking miles to bring their sick infants here," he said. Through word of mouth, residents have heard that a new facility has opened with new equipment and they want the very best for their families, so they are willing to come from long distances to get here, he continued. "With the weather getting cooler, the most common ailment we're seeing is upper respiratory infections including colds and flu."

The clinic is open six days a week, 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Physician's assistant Sa'ad Naji Fayadz, who is in charge of the clinic's respiratory department, points out that the project was delayed for more than two years and people kept asking, "When will it be finished?"

The delays continued and the situation did not improve "until we got rid of the insurgents." He said the community was very grateful when construction restarted and the new facility finally opened earlier this month. "It's very beautiful. Everything is as it should be and we've never seen a place like this in our lives," he added.

Navy Cmdr. Steve Frost with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers knows from personal experience the turnaround in that community. "In April, as we were exiting the unfinished facility, we had a 40-minute gunfight there during which one of our vehicles was destroyed by an RPG. Today, you have mothers coming up, inviting you to hold their babies, a big step for Iraqis. It is truly rewarding to see the smiles on their faces and this has been well worth the



As work continues to complete Nasr Wa Salam's new primary healthcare center located between Baghdad and Fallujah, the medical staff there has taken over beneficial occupancy and are seeing 250 to 450 patients daily. They say residents are very pleased with the expanded capabilities that the new facility and equipment provides their community. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is overseeing construction of the \$1 million project. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

effort." Frost is overseeing the construction of 30 new PHCs in Baghdad Province and 11 PHCs in Al Anbar Province.

The new facility includes a birthing center where an average of four newborns are delivered each week. "We monitor expectant mothers with regular monthly checkups, keeping an eye on their blood pressure, weight, blood and urine analysis," said Nurse Sumaya Hamid Rashid. "If any problems arise, we provide treatment." One of the goals of Iraq's 142 new primary healthcare centers is reducing Iraq's overall infant mortality rate. So far, 67 of those PHCs have been turned over to the Ministry of Health, 33 are open to the public, and the overall program is 95 percent complete.

Sumaya said that because of the large influx of new patients, they have asked the Ministry of Health to consider extending their hours with the eventual goal of offering round-the-clock healthcare. She said area residents are "proud and happy to see their new facility. Every day more and more people come. It's benefitting our entire community." Currently six doctors, four dentists, and 14 nurses make up the medical team there.

The 1,940-sq.-meter single-story medical facility (a C-level clinic, the largest of three types of PHCs being built) provides medical and dental examination and treatment rooms, X-ray capabilities, testing laboratory, pharmacy, vaccinations, an emergency department, newborn nursery and ultrasound room, a labor and delivery department, a laundry and sterilization area. The \$1 million project includes a water treatment system and diesel generators for emergency power.

"This is great," said Lt. Col. Doug Lougee, 2nd Battalion Surgeon with the 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. "Just a month ago it was an empty building and now it's one of the pillars of the community. The clinic has been packed and it's really gratifying to see that they now have their own medical home that they can come to," he continued. "The clinic staff is wonderful. We know them all, and they're working hard for their people."



Iraqi families have welcomed the new primary healthcare center that recently opened at Nasr Wa Salam between Baghdad and Fallujah. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)



Navy Cmdr. Steve Frost with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers visited Nasr Wa Salam's newly-opened primary healthcare center recently. "It's truly rewarding seeing the smiles on people's faces. Some walked miles carrying their sick infants to get medical assistance here," he said. Frost is overseeing the construction of 30 PHCs in Baghdad Province and 11 PHCs in Al Anbar Province. He handed out toys and candy to youngsters as they awaited their turn to see a doctor. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

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